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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 001044

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STATE FOR AF/C
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA ACTION OFFICERS
EUCOM FOR J5-1 AFRICA DIVISION AND POLAD YATES

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CM](#)

SUBJECT: TRADITIONAL LEADERS SEEK EMBASSY PROTECTION WHEN
GOV'T FORCES USE VIOLENCE IN SUCCESSION DISPUTE

REF: A. SPOT REPORT SENT FROM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE RSO TO
WASHINGTON AT 1100 AUGUST 21

[1](#)B. COUNTRY REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES SECTION
ON CAMEROON 2003 AND SUBSEQUENT

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. Nineteen men from the community of Sabga in Cameroon's Northwest Province gathered outside of the Embassy compound at the opening of business on August 21 claiming fear of arrest, violence, and deadly force in retaliation for their opposition to an effort to install a government-sponsored successor as Lamido (traditional ruler) of Sabga, a Muslim community of about 500 people. The men explained that they had traveled overnight from Sabga to seek Embassy protection, claiming government gendarmes would arrest and had threatened to kill some of them. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Poloff and RSO went at about 0945 local time to communicate with the group, who had been seated on the sidewalk along the street outside the Embassy compound. Embassy RSO office sent a spot report on the situation through DS channels (ref a). The group included a number of traditional rulers from the Sabga community who had blocked roads to the Lamido's palace in Sabga on August 20 to prevent the government from installing Mamuda Sabga as the new Lamido. Mamuda Sabga's candidacy is supported by Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Donpullo, a wealthy and politically powerful businessman with a history of conflict with the Mboroboro (see specific mention of Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Donpullo and Mboroboro conflicts, ref b), and opposed by the Sabga community and the structures of traditional power. (More detail on the background of the Sabga dispute below.) In response, government forces (estimated by the group at 100-150 gendarmes) fired tear gas containers and live rounds into the crowd. The men presented tear gas canisters and bullet casings to support their claims. An uncertain number of people were injured. No deaths have been reported.

[1](#)3. (U) The men said they traveled overnight from Sabga to the Embassy to avoid being caught by government forces and civilian groups that had been armed by Donpullo. The men asked for protection in the Embassy compound and provided documents supporting their claims regarding the succession dispute. At 1300 Poloff informed the spokesperson for the group that they would not be granted shelter within the Embassy, and that the Embassy would not seek to remove them from the public space in front of the Embassy. The spokesperson did not protest. By 1300, a local television press team arrived to interview members of the group.

Background of the dispute

¶4. (U) The community of Sabga, which comprises around 500 ethnic Mboroboro, a sub-group of the Fulani ethnic community that stretches across Cameroon and into Chad, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Niger, and Mali, is also known as the Lamidate of Sabga. The traditional ruler of the Lamidate of Sabga is referred to as the Lamido. The most recent Lamido of Sabga, Ahmadou Sabga, died on June 13. The Fahda, a council that advises the Lamido during his tenure and represents the community during the vacancy of the Lamidou, met on June 15 and voted to select Ahmadou Bouba, a nephew of the deceased Lamido, to be his successor. Eleven of the Fahda's fourteen members voted in favor of Ahmadou Bouba; two members abstained; one member voted for Mamuda Sabga, a brother of the deceased Lamido and a candidate supported by Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Donpullo. According to the representatives of the Fahda, this process was in compliance with Cameroonian law, which required them to notify the Government of Cameroon (GRC) through the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) for the Mezam Division, Jules Marcellin Ndjaga.

¶5. (U) SDO Ndjaga, in an August 20 conversation with Charge (who happened to be in the region), argued that the supporters of Ahmadou Bouba had not followed the proper procedures and that Mamuda Sabga was the only candidate submitted for the position. We believe Ndjaga was referring to the Sabga community's refusal to participate in a process (a "college of notables") that the SDO established to select the next Lamido. The members of the Fahda argued that this process was incongruent with traditional practice and Cameroonian law regarding the government's role in approving a community's selection of its traditional ruler, and therefore refused to participate in it.

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Push Comes to Shove

¶6. (U) On August 20, according to reports from Embassy contacts, between 100 and 150 gendarmes came to Sabga for the "presentation" of Mamuda Sabga as the next Lamido of Sabga. (Note. "Presentation" is apparently one step short of "installation" of the new Lamido. End note.) The residents of Sabga blocked the roads leading to the Lamido's palace. The situation remained calm until, according to the representatives of the Fahda, Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Donpullo arrived. At this point the gendarmes fired tear gas to disperse the crowd. Several live rounds were reportedly fired, including at least one that struck a horse on which one of the town residents was seated.

¶7. (U) The group assembled in front of the Embassy further claimed that Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Donpullo provided arms and money to a group of men from the Babanki, a largely Christian, separate ethnic group in the area. The Sabga group claimed to have captured one of these men, who had attempted to raid Sabga, and that he was armed with an AK-47.

¶8. (SBU) Embassy sources on this matter include an Embassy employee who is from the Sabga area and an American citizen missionary living in the area, both of whom side with the Fahda and Amadou Bouba and against Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Donpullo and Mamuda Sabga.
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